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ABSTRACT

Program materials for Mississippi 4-H Field and Stream are carefully controlled and made available only to volunteer leaders who have completed leader training workshops. This document describes the Mississippi 4-H Field and Stream program, discusses the leader training workshops and their significance, and provides responses to frequently asked questions about the program. The program covers wildlife-related activities, hunting, fishing, and shooting sports. The leader training workshop system is justified to continue delivering a cohesive, effective, and safe program that meets 4-H objectives of youth development and conservation education. Answers to common questions cover traditional and nontraditional aspects of the 4-H Field and Stream program, how much time county extension agents must commit to program development and maintenance, how much time is expected from volunteer leaders, why certified hunter-education instructors need further training to conduct the program, differences between 4-H instructional techniques and those of other programs, the content covered in leader training workshops, why 4-H Field and Stream is a valuable addition to other county programs, why leaders are certified through state-level workshops, who conducts the training, the need for a team of leaders, how to start a program if a team of leaders does not attend the workshops, and the experience or background necessary for leaders. (SV)

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# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF "MISSISSIPPI 4-H FIELD AND STREAM WORKSHOPS" FOR VOLUNTEER LEADERS AND COUNTY PROGRAMS

Volunteer leader training workshops are offered infrequently, and the scheduling is seldom convenient for everyone who wants to attend. The time commitment required for a workshop is significant. Although workshop costs are held to a minimum, the financial investment is a factor for many volunteers. Mississippi 4-H Field and Stream materials are carefully controlled and are made available only to workshop graduates. County agents and volunteers deserve an explanation for this control and for the significance of the workshops. This workshop system is justified in order to continue delivering a cohesive, effective, and safe Mississippi 4-H Field and Stream program. Without exception, leaders who have invested time and money in a workshop concur with this approach.

Participants have made suggestions to streamline the workshops and make participation easier. However, whenever exceptions to the workshop-based system were tried, participants encountered difficulties with program content, objectives, orientation, recruitment, methods, and continuity. This format departure caused the programs to drift from the core of 4-H program objectives and to compromise the integrity of the program. With a strong workshop-based foundation, the program has been an outstanding recruiting opportunity and an excellent tool for delivering youth development and conservation messages. In addition, it has exposed young people to other 4-H programs. To maximize the chances of recruiting new members to 4-H, leaders must be well prepared, highly motivated, and interested when they are interacting with young people.

Responses to common questions about the program follow.

***Is Mississippi 4-H Field and Stream a traditional 4-H program?***

Yes and no. Wildlife and fisheries programs and shooting sports programs are both traditional and innovative.

They are traditional in that they include all the core elements of a 4-H program: a youth development base, safety education, skills development, interaction with positive adult role models, and career exploration.



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Their roots in natural resources, angling, riflery, and archery are also traditional. The hands-on teaching methods are traditional, and the leader development model, once a major innovation, has become traditional in the delivery of other programs.

The team-teaching approach, the relatively flexible format for delivery, and the audiences are relatively nontraditional. In many states, the proportion of adult volunteers and youth who were not previously 4-H members before enrolling in the 4-H Field and Stream program exceeds 80 percent.

The program is traditional where it counts. Its nontraditional components may lead the way for innovations and impacts in the 4-H program across the nation.

***How much time of the county agent is required to develop and maintain the program?***

The amount of time county staff must commit to the program varies with organizational style, willingness to develop volunteer management systems, and personal interests. Initial development of the program may require a minimum of 40 to 80 hours over the course of the year, including attendance at a workshop. Some agents have spent only 15 to 20 hours getting the program started effectively. Maintenance time also varies. It could require just 8 to 12 hours per year giving advice and consent to a volunteer committee and handling normal communications with leaders, committees, state staff, and young people.

Some agents choose to maintain a higher profile and a deeper involvement. Often it may be best to limit involvement to the amount of time needed for visibility, program understanding, and personal satisfaction, but it is very important for agents to maintain that visibility and program understanding.

***How much time is expected from a volunteer?***

The time commitment for volunteers varies dramatically. Many Field and Stream volunteers are deeply committed to the program's objectives; however, a great challenge for them is managing their time in order to avoid burnout. Burnout can result in a high turnover rate among volunteers.

A comprehensive, basic program can easily involve 50 to 80 hours annually of direct youth contact in instruction alone. Involvement with practice sessions, matches, fund-raising, and planning activities can multiply that time commitment.

Participants in the state events are required to have completed 8 hours of 4-H Field and Stream training per discipline and have participated in at least two club, county, or multicounty matches (events) before the state event. If a small team of volunteers commits that kind of time, they usually burn out within 2 to 5 years, with 3 years being average.

Having a large leader corps ensures a high leader-to-youth ratio. A large number of leaders also increases the potential for youth-adult mentoring, development of other relationships, and multiple approaches to program elements.

The program requires the constant recruitment of volunteers by volunteers and meaningful involvement of newly recruited leaders. Like the training model, this shared leadership model holds great promise for 4-H use in today's environment. Very few potential leaders will refuse to invest 1 or 2 hours in something they enjoy with a youth audience. Usually the greater problem is getting leaders to establish limits to their time commitment rather than trying to get more time from them. Accordingly, use a large team of volunteers to deliver small segments of the total program, allowing small individual time commitments.

***Why can't I simply use any existing hunter education or National Rifle Association (NRA) instructors certified by other agencies or organizations to conduct a program?***

Existing hunter education instructors, NRA-certified instructors or coaches, certified archery instructors, or similar individuals are excellent *resources* for starting the program. For them, the primary function of the workshop is orientation to the scope, intent, and methods of working within the 4-H program. Without that background, the programs that emerge are often renamed repetitions of existing programs available through those other organizations. The distinctive orientation, approach, and methods of the Mississippi 4-H Field and Stream program make it uniquely 4-H. Without those elements and guidelines for program management and support, the program risks its integrity and effectiveness, as well as its value as a 4-H recruitment tool. Workshop content helps leaders deliver an effective, high-quality, and self-sustaining youth development program using angling, hunting, shooting sports, and wildlife and fisheries management as vehicles. The workshops seek to assure quality control and program consistency.

Testimonials from NRA training counselors, NRA instructors, National Archery Association (NAA) instructors,

hunter education instructors (and coordinators), police firearms instructors, and others who are highly qualified and experienced in teaching their disciplines underscore the value of these workshops to persons who are already qualified by another organization. Recently, an NRA and Olympic Shooting Sports coach attended a 4-H Field and Stream Volunteer Leader Workshop. His comments include the following: "I applaud the methods used by 4-H and the Field and Stream program. Volunteers trained like yourself are key to delivering a positive message about shooting sports and wildlife management."

***Do the 4-H techniques differ significantly from those used in other programs?***

The proven techniques used in the Mississippi 4-H Field and Stream program are compatible with the currently existing programs offered by other organizations. They differ in being pointedly based on youth development objectives and in addressing angling, shooting sports, and wildlife and fisheries management broadly, rather than as a set of disconnected individual disciplines. **Young people and adult leaders are 4-H's products.** 4-H's techniques yield high success rates with both personal development and outdoor skills.

***What concepts are covered in a 4-H Field and Stream workshop?***

The workshops are a "mini" version of the national program workshops. The core centers on safety and responsibility; teaching skills; coaching principles; 4-H objectives and organization; sources of support; and means of linking angling-, hunting-, shooting sports-, and wildlife-related projects to other 4-H programs. A set of basic disciplines [archery, hunting, Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Project (WHEP), muzzleloading, pistol, rifle, and shotgun] extends from the core. Every leader receives the core materials, and each is trained in a specialized discipline. Only one discipline may be taken at any given workshop because of the time requirements and the content load that must be communicated. It is essential that a leader cover the basic elements before going on to advanced activities. The current workshop format includes instructional experiences, use of videos and slides, lecture, and live fire.

A dynamic team approach to teaching and program management is strongly encouraged. Each instructor receives more training (18 hours plus) than required for certification by the official certification organization in his or her discipline. Because inexperienced persons can become effective instructors through the program, a prior knowledge of wildlife, fishing, or shooting sports is not necessary. Enhanced outdoor skills, including marksmanship, frequently result from the training; teaching the instructor how to shoot better is a bonus and a demonstration of the effectiveness of the techniques.

***Why is Mississippi 4-H Field and Stream a valuable addition to the programs in a county?***

Mississippi 4-H Field and Stream has the highest value to county programs when used as a recruitment tool for young people and adults not already in the 4-H program. It has appeal to a wide range of youth, in all socioeconomic levels, in both urban and rural settings. It promotes learning fundamental life skills, has direct links to natural resources education, and leads to exploration of careers and lifelong hobby activities. It provides many links to the rest of the 4-H program, including leadership development. **In short, the Mississippi 4-H Field and Stream program is another tool you can use to increase the impact of 4-H in your community.**

***Why are leaders certified through state-level workshops?***

State-level workshops provide a way of ensuring the quality of leadership, the preparation of leaders, and the efficient use of the volunteers who make up the county team. This team, in turn, provides training to the young people in its county. This is also another way to involve volunteers at a higher level and allow the agent to provide program oversight. Additionally, legal concerns require leaders to be certified in this manner.

***Who conducts the training?***

Volunteers or agents with national training in their disciplines provide the instruction. State instructors attend a national workshop and commit to training volunteers for 3 years. Almost all the instructors are also certified by other organizations or agencies, and the provided instruction surpasses the requirements for instructor certification by those organizations and agencies.

***Why send a team of leaders?***

A team of leaders provides mutual support, broader insight, and stronger program development for the county. As the team grows larger (15-20 persons), the intensity, depth, and breadth of the program tends to increase. Having a large team also reduces individual burnout among volunteers.

***Why can't a single leader cover this project?***

This program is too large for one person to provide the leadership necessary for the program's success. Training in a discipline requires 12-14 hours. Common subject matter requires another 6-8 hours. The format of the workshop does not permit multiple certification in a single workshop.

In addition to the constraints of the training, two other problems, both potentially more serious, arise. First, the leader may feel overwhelmed by the sheer mass of the program, electing either to give it up or to limit it to his or her own special interest. Although having a program delivered by someone with that special interest is ideal, limiting the program to one aspect severely cripples recruitment and retention potential. The other serious impact is the burnout problem previously mentioned. Asking one leader to cover everything in Mississippi 4-H Field and Stream is like asking one leader to cover everything in livestock. Someone may try and may even have some success. However, he will burn out very quickly because of trying to do more than he can effectively accomplish without support.

***What is the best way to get the program started if a team is not sent?***

Send someone who is willing to explore the coordinator's role and assist in recruiting key leaders who are willing to take part in the state training workshop and are willing to commit to coaching young people. It may require a longer time period to get started, but this approach has shown its value many times. Unlike the lone, single-discipline instructor, the coordinator is positioned to organize a team of supportive instructors and to press for high-quality training from them. Getting access to the basic materials distributed at the workshop can be used as an incentive in recruiting leaders. Materials from Extension specialists are also available to help in the start-up of a new Mississippi 4-H Field and Stream club. Don't be afraid to use resources from another county. Schedule training promotions and meetings so that trained instructors from other counties can help.

***What kind of experience or background is necessary for leaders?***

The prime requisite for leaders working with Mississippi 4-H Field and Stream is a commitment to helping youth develop an eagerness to learn. An open and active mind is essential. Willingness to risk trying new methods or ideas is also helpful in building successful programs. Training, shooting skills, or certification from other programs can be helpful but is not essential. Experience with shooting and shooting instruction using other materials may present a barrier to learning sound 4-H instructional methods.

Excellent target shooters are not necessarily excellent instructors. *The key to success is not shooting ability, but instructional ability.* The trophy must be the development of the young person, making each young person a winner.

Send to the workshop a caring, self-disciplined person with a love for young people and a desire to help them...and you will be rewarded with a motivated, well-prepared Mississippi 4-H Field and Stream instructor.

Mississippi State University Extension Service

**www.ext.msstate.edu**

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